

Reds Resume Tests Of Space A-Vehicle

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The Soviet Union has resumed its testing of a space vehicle for putting a nuclear weapons carrier in partial orbit, it was learned yesterday.

Tass, the Soviet news agency, announced the shot as Cosmos 244 without indicating its military nature.

But the flight path of the rocket—launched from Tyuratam Oct. 2—left no doubt in the minds of space experts here that it was a Fractional Orbital Bombardment System shot, or FOBS.

In a FOBS mission the rocket goes into space and then comes back down to earth without completing a whole orbit.

Cosmos 244 returned to earth in this fashion in the 13th test of the system. Presumably no bomb was aboard.

The United States and Russia have signed a treaty "not to place in orbit around the earth any objects carrying nuclear weapons or any other kinds of weapons of mass destruction . . ."

The testing of vehicles like FOBS, even though it is designed to carry bombs into space in the time of war, is not forbidden by the treaty.

But military leaders see the latest FOBS test as fresh evidence that the Soviet Union has designs on the high ground of outer space.

A question the next President will have to answer is whether the U.S. must take stronger counter-measures to combat the Soviet military space trends.

The last time the Russians launched a FOBS was about five months ago, on April 25, 1968.

U.S. military analysts believe FOBS is designed to knock out American bomber bases in a war. The rocket system would send an H-bomb down on the base from space.

A FOBS rocket would fly to the United States, under this scenario, by taking the long way around the earth to avoid detection by American radar watching Russia from Greenland.

These radars—the Ballistic Missile Early Warning System—cannot see beyond the curve of the earth. They spot Soviet rockets as they rise above the horizon. This would give the U.S. about 15 minutes warning of a missile attack.

FOBS stays below the horizon where the Greenland radars cannot see it, thus reducing the warning time. But

Pentagon civilian leaders contend new American radars which can see over the horizon negate FOBS' advantage of surprise.

Some military leaders are not so sure. They are pressing for faster development of anti-satellite weapons.

Former Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara told Congress in secret session earlier this year that the United States was working on an anti-satellite weapon which promised to be so accurate that it could knock out another satellite by detonating a conventional explosive, not a nuclear one, near it.

U.S. military leaders believe the Russians are using the giant SS-9 Scarp rocket to launch its FOBS payload. Such a rocket could carry about 10,000 pounds in the FOBS flight path.

The latest FOBS flight followed the course of earlier ones, flying as low as 84 miles and as high as 127 miles. COSMOS 244 crossed the Equator at an angle of 50 degrees.

The first FOBS shot occurred on Sept. 17, 1966. There was no official U.S. comment on the Oct. 2 shot.

On the civilian space front, the Soviets on Saturday launched another Molniya communications satellite. They said in announcing the shot yesterday that Molniya was operating satisfactorily.